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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a project which examined the impact of various forms of social work intervention with parents on the functioning of the parents and their preschool children. Subjects were 105 children attending one of two day care centers and their welfare families. Effects of three intervention and two nonintervention conditions were studied. The intervention conditions included two open ended approaches (one supportive, offering direct assistance, problem-solving and encouragement, the other interpretive, aimed at helping the parent understand the nature of his/her experience) and a problem oriented approach which focused on specific problem areas. The nonintervention control group conditions included families who had been offered treatment but could not utilize it and families for whom social work services were not available. Children in intervention and control groups were matched for Stanford Binet I.Q. score, sex and age. Assessments were made (at 5, 12 and 24 months after entry in the program) of the parent-child relationship and the child's development, and parent-child and child factor scores were then intercorrelated. Results indicated that parents in all intervention programs (especially those in the open-ended interpretive group) had higher factor scores on being available, affectionate and communicative. Children in the open ended interpretive condition had higher I.Q. scores at 5 months and 24 months after entry into the program. Follow-up testing at the start of kindergarten and one year after families had left the program showed that treatment children, especially the interpretive group, maintained the I.Q. level seen at the 6-week point, whereas the control groups showed a significant decline. (SB)

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CHANGES IN THE PRESCHOOL CHILD AS A FUNCTION OF
CHANGE IN THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP*

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Considerable research demonstrates the association between parent-child relationship variables and child development indices (Baumrind, 1969; Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Yarrow, Rubenstein and Pedersen, 1975). Less is known about how a particular intervention affects both the pattern of family-child relationships and the development of the child.

I would like to report selected findings from a project which systematically examined the impact of various forms of social work intervention with the parents on their functioning and on the functioning of their day care preschool children. More extensive reports of this project are to be found in Heinicke, 1976 and Heinicke et al., 1976.

Population and Setting.

Cross-sectional assessments of 105 preschool children and their welfare

families were made at entry and 6 weeks, 5 months, 12 months, and 24 months after they had entered either the Culver City or San Pablo day care Center. Follow-up assessments were made before and after kindergarten and one and two years after the family no longer had any contact with the program. Previous surveys of the same welfare population had shown that the children from these families as opposed to other segments of the school community significantly more often failed to make an adequate adjustment to kindergarten. The primary prevention purpose of the intervention with the parents was highlighted by the assessment of the parents in the study sample: Only 16.7% of the mothers were married but more important, the frequent presence of depression focused on current and past relationships to men. These women were frequently forced into motherhood, had often not received sufficient mothering themselves, and were not only not assisted in their child care by the men they were involved with, but were often psychologically and physically hurt by them.

Type of Intervention with the Parents.

The effects of five different treatment conditions were studied. Four were studied in the Culver City Center. The first two of these were named: The open-ended interpretive and open-ended supportive approaches. In the open-ended approach neither area of discussion nor length of contact between parent and social worker were specifically limited. Weekly contacts tended to be arranged, and shortly before the child left the Center, the social worker moved towards a meaningful termination with the parents.

In the conceptualization of the open-ended technique, two qualitatively different approaches to the parent were recognized -- supportive and interpretive.

Within the supportive mode, the goal was to facilitate the autonomous adaptation of the parent through problem-solving, encouragement, and also direct assistance. Within the interpretive approach, the goal was to help the parent understand the nature of his or her experience.

The third treatment condition, the problem-oriented, is not open-ended but focuses on specific problem areas.

The fourth treatment condition consisted of those families who were offered one of the above forms of help but could not utilize it.

The fifth treatment condition involved the families at the San Pablo Day Care Center for whom social work services were not available. No direct intervention was used in relation to the children in any of the treatment conditions.

In order to study the impact of various forms of intervention, the three intervention groups (open-ended interpretive, open-ended supportive, and problem-oriented) and the two non-intervention control groups (treatment not available and treatment offered but not utilized) were constituted on a case-for-case matching basis in such a way that they were equivalent at 6 weeks after entry on the Stanford-Binet I.Q. score, sex, and age at entry into Center. It happened that as a result of this matching, there also were no significant group differences on almost all of the indices to be discussed shortly. There were six families in each of the five treatment groups, making a total of 30 cases.

Measures of the Parent-Child Relationship.

Fourteen different parent-ratings based on interview and observation of parent-child interaction data were available at each assessment point. These ratings tap such areas as affection-giving, clarity of communication, etc. They were checked for their reliability in a variety of ways, including comparison with independent behavioral categorizations based on 40 minute samples of mother-child interaction.

Measures of the Child's Development.

Of the 22 child measures, some consisted of ratings based on daily observations in the preschool classroom, e.g., the ability to make the psychological move from the parents to new relationships in the preschool and the nature of the peer relations. Specific on-the-spot categorizations of the child's task orientation during the story-time, yielded such distinctions as "disrupts." Also available were the Stanford-Binet I.Q. scores, ratings of the quality of involvement in that test situation, and scores derived both from the Draw-a-Person Test and a projective doll-play situation. Extensive reliability checks were again carried out.

The Intercorrelation of Parent-Child and Child Factor Scores.

Separate factor analyses were carried out at each assessment point for both the parent-child and child development measures and the resulting factor scores were then intercorrelated. (See Table 1.) The San Pablo control group was not included in this analysis because certain data were unavailable.

The major findings were as follows: The cluster of parent-child ratings describing the parent's affection-giving and another one describing the parent's ability to move the child to new relationships and cognitive experiences, fairly consistently correlated with a child factor labeled "adaptation-competence." The latter typically loaded on the ability to make the psychological move into the preschool, good peer relations, the ability to modulate aggression, the global rating of task orientation and the Stanford-Binet I.Q. The cluster describing the parent's ability to facilitate the child's new relationships and cognitive experiences also correlated with the child's high ratings of task orientation in the Stanford-Binet I.Q. situation.

Parent-child and Child Factor Scores as a Function of Treatment.

The major findings on the impact of parent treatment on the parent-child and child factor scores are given in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5. Simplifying somewhat, parents in all three treatment groups but especially those in the open-ended interpretive treatment group by 12 and especially 24 months after entry into the program, had significantly higher factor scores on being available, affectionate, and communicative, and also that factor which described their moving the child to new cognitive and relationship experiences.

Similarly, from five months on, the children of the parents experiencing the open-ended interpretive intervention had higher scores on the factor describing their adaptation-competence. These same children did not, however, reach the highest scores on a factor describing their task orientation in the Stanford Binet I.Q. situation until the 24 months assessment point.

Changes in I.Q. as a Function of Treatment

Extensive analysis of single variables supports and further specifies the conclusion that social work intervention with the parents and especially so the open-ended interpretive mode had a significant impact on the functioning of the parents and their children. Figure 1 gives the trends for one such specific variable -- the Stanford Binet I.Q. The second control group, San Pablo, who were not offered social work services, are now included.

Analysis of variance, using a repeated measures design, showed that the interaction between time in program and treatment group was highly significant; $P = .006$. Because of the matching, there are no group differences in I.Q. at the entry point or 6 weeks. Nor were there any significant differences in I.Q. at 12 months, but at both 5 months and 24 months, the children in the open-ended interpretive group had significantly higher I.Q. scores than the children whose parents could not utilize the treatment; $P < .05$.

Follow-up I.Q. testing both at the start of kindergarten and one year after the families had left the program showed that the treatment groups and particularly the open-ended interpretive group maintained the level of I.Q. seen at the 6 weeks point whereas the control groups showed a significant decline; $P < .05$.

Concluding Remarks

This brief paper cannot do justice to a project which will eventually be written up in book form. What it does show, first of all, is that certain parent-child relationship clusters -- being available, affectionate and communicative, and another describing the parent moving the child to new cognitive and relationship experiences -- do correlate with two of the most important child clusters: Adaptation-competence and task orientation in the I.Q. test situation. These findings are parallel to those previously reported by Clarke-Stewart (1973) and Baumrind (1969). Not previously reported in the research literature is how both of these sets of clusters changed as a function of particular forms of social work intervention. Further analysis revealed that the most successful intervention with this population of mothers involved a change in their personal functioning which in turn was related to a change in the way they related to their child who in turn gave evidence of maximizing his or her potential for development.

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TABLE 1
SHOWING INTERCORRELATION OF PARENT-CHILD
AND CHILD FACTOR SCORES

Parent-Child vs Child Factor Score	Time Point After Entry Into Program			
	6 wk	5 mo	12 mo	24 mo
Available, Affectionate vs Adaptation-Competence	.257	.547 ^d	.644 ^d	.461 ^a
Move Child to New vs Adaptation-Competence	.438 ^c	.362 ^a	.587 ^c	.445 ^a
Available, Affectionate vs Task Orientation in I.Q.	.080	.260	.143	.149
Move Child to New vs Task Orientation in I.Q.	.273 ^a	.411 ^c	.186	.446 ^a

Level of statistical significance:

- ^a P < .05
- ^b P < .01
- ^c P < .005
- ^d P < .0005

TABLE 2
DIFFERENCES IN PARENT BEING AVAILABLE, AFFECTIONATE
AND COMMUNICATING AS A FUNCTION OF TREATMENT

Time Point After Entry Into Program			
6 Weeks	5 Months	12 Months	24 Months
problem orient.		interpretive	interpretive
V		V	problem orient.
supportive		control	supportive
			control
F = N.S.*	F = N.S.	F = N.S.	F = .006
P < .029		P < .031	

*
Level of Statistical Significance:

F value for result of Analysis of Variance applied to all treatment groups is given in first line.

P values for individual comparisons are given where F is not significant.

TABLE 3
DIFFERENCES IN MOVING CHILD TO
NEW RELATIONSHIPS AND COGNITION EXPERIENCES
AS A FUNCTION OF TREATMENT

6 Weeks	Time Point After Entry Into Program		
	5 Months	12 Months	24 Months
interpretive	interpretive	interpretive	interpretive
V	V	supportive	problem orient.
		problem orient	supportive
control	control	control	control
F = N. S.	F = N. S.	F = .024	F = .035
P < .045	P < .040		

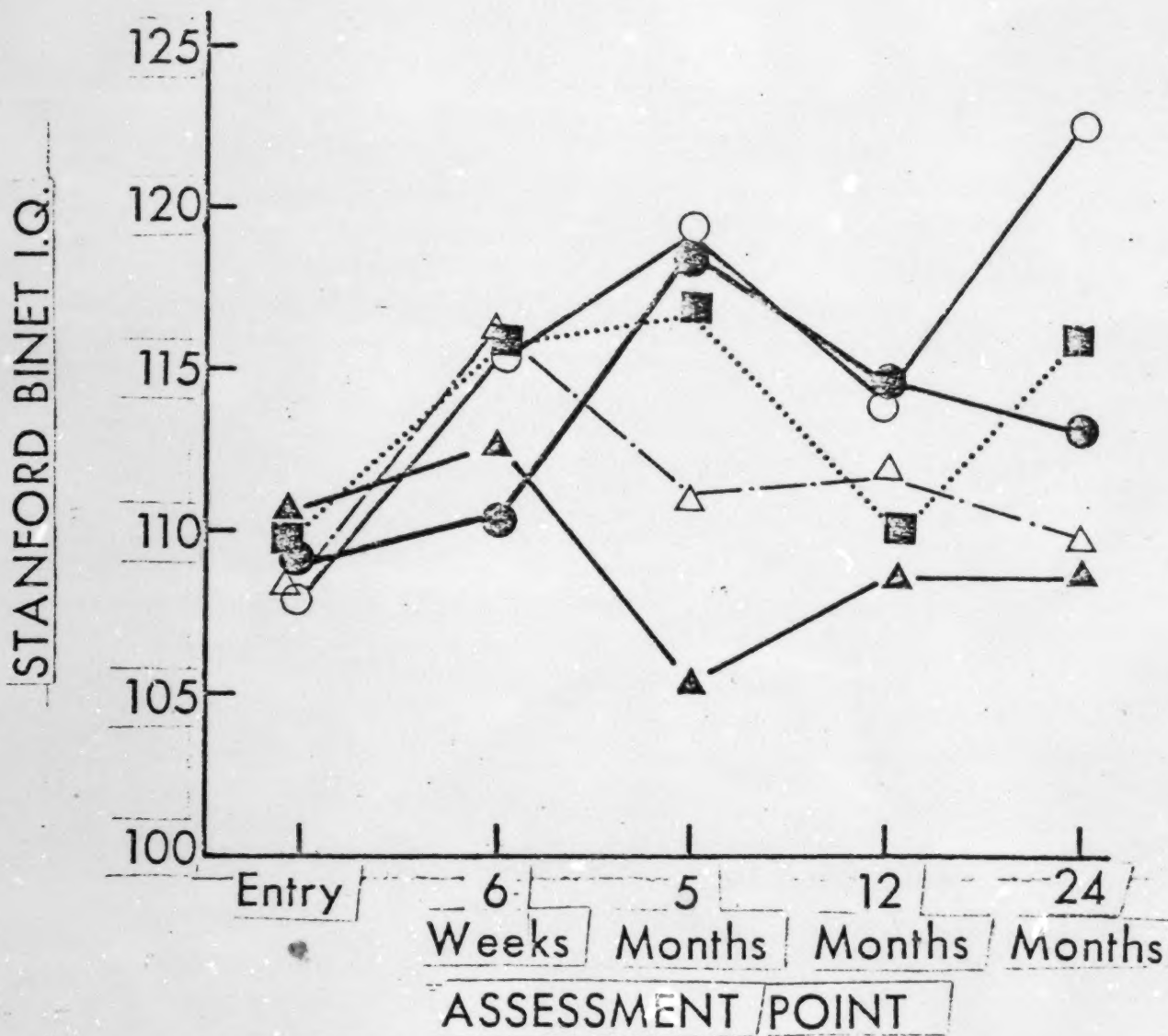
TABLE 4
DIFFERENCES IN ADAPTATION-COMPETENCE
AS A FUNCTION OF TREATMENT

6 Weeks	Time Point After Entry Into Program		
	5 Months	12 Months	24 Months
	interpretive	interpretive	interpretive
	problem orient.	V	V
	supportive		
	control	control	control
F = N.S.	F = .036	F = N.S. P < .010	F = N.S. P < .045

TABLE 5
DIFFERENCES IN THE TASK ORIENTATION
IN THE STANFORD-BINET I.Q. SITUATION
AS A FUNCTION OF TREATMENT

Time Point After Entry Into Program			
6 Weeks	5 Months	12 Months	24 Months
problem orient. V control	supportive problem orient. interpretive control	supportive problem orient. interpretive control	interpretive V problem orient. & control
F = N.S. P < .045	F = .036	F = .012	F = N.S. P < .038 P < .018

FIGURE 1



LEGEND:

- Culver City Open-ended interpretive
- Culver City Open-ended supportive
- Culver City Problem-oriented supportive and/or interpretive
- △ San Pablo Treatment not available
- ▲ Culver City Treatment offered but not utilized

MEAN I.Q. SCORE FOR FIVE DIFFERENT TREATMENT GROUPS
AS THESE GROUPS MOVED THROUGH
FIVE SUCCEEDING ASSESSMENT POINTS
(6 Cases in Each Treatment Group Matched on I.Q. at 6 Weeks)